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OF
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AND
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FOR AN
INDIVIDUAL UTILITY BELT SECTION

INDIVIDUAL UTILITY BELT SECTION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

The present patent application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. application Serial No. 09/939,619, filed August 28, 2001.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 This invention relates to a utility carrier which serves to attach accessories, normally worn on a standard waist belt, to a user's clothing and other material edges.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

10 Carrying accessories on a waist belt is well known, and many commercial items are adapted to be attached to the waistband by a belt. Likewise, specialized utility belts and proprietary accessory clips are common. There are, however, several disadvantages to the current methods of attaching accessories to one's person. Belts, as typically used, require
15 unbuckling to open one's trousers for various required duties. Unbuckling sometimes allows heavy accessories to fall to the floor at inopportune times; the reverse may also prove

cumbersome. When removing an accessory from the belt, the user must unbuckle the belt, which may loosen the waistband. Some trades and/or leisure activities require wearing of a tool bag, lumbar support, or backpack. Normally worn, these structures cover a standard belt, leaving the user with no convenient place to carry accessories. Specialized utility belts are usually worn to carry a multitude of accessories specifically associated with the intended purpose of the utility belt, but are rarely able to accommodate accessories designed to be worn on a standard waist belt. Specialized utility belts and the hip belts used on lumbar packs and backpacks are commonly limited by their construction and cannot usually accommodate belt-wearable accessories. Proprietary clips are typically designed to accommodate only the device with which they are supplied. It is therefore desirable to provide a device that will allow a user to easily carry one or more accessories without relying solely on a standard belt, specialized utility belt, hip belt, or proprietary accessory clip.

The present invention has the advantages of: 1) allowing easy removal of accessories without unbuckling or otherwise disassembling any other apparatus worn by the user, 2) allowing removal of the invention with or without accessories attached,

3) requiring no belt or belt-like apparatus encircling the waist to carry accessories, and 4) providing the ability to carry accessories in a variety of locations other than the waist, especially when the waist is obscured by another apparatus.

5 U.S. Patent No. 3,767,092, issued October 23, 1973 to Garrison et al., describes a clamping hanger having a body including an integrally molded hook and clamping means comprising at least a pair of gripping members. The gripping members are secured in the closed position by means of a locking clip slidably mounted within recesses provided in the gripping
10 members and held therein by means of a retaining bar spanning the recess of at least one of the gripping members.

U.S. Patent No. 1,597,734, issued August 31, 1926 to Sousa, Jr., describes an apparel belt comprising a main belt having means for removably attaching its ends together, and an auxiliary belt secured intermediate its
15 ends to the main belt and having devices for removably attaching the ends of the auxiliary belt to the main belt. The auxiliary belt is arranged to slidably receive different articles without unfastening the main belt, whereby the articles may be slid along the auxiliary belt to different positions into and out of the way to suit the convenience of the user.

20 U.S. Patent No. 5,511,706, issued April 30, 1996 to Hendrickson, describes an apparatus for carrying multiple pairs of handcuffs comprising a wristlet retaining member attachable to a belt. The retaining member is

shaped to define a wristlet receiving slot dimensioned to slidably receive a portion of one of the handcuffs. The retaining member includes a biasing portion and a rigid portion with one end of the rigid portion overlapping one end of the biasing portion such that the biasing portion is positioned inwardly adjacent the second end of the rigid portion. The biasing portion is selectively movable between a closed position wherein the second end of the biasing portion is biased against the second end of the rigid portion and an open position wherein the second end of the biasing portion is deflected inwardly away from the second end of the rigid portion so as to provide a wristlet receiving passageway in open communication with the wristlet receiving slot and through which one side of one of the wristlets is insertable such that the wristlet is connected to and suspended from the retaining member when the biasing portion is in the closed position.

U.S. Patent No. 5,586,707, issued December 24, 1996 to Haskell, describes a holder for score cards with an embodiment consisting of a base "belt" (14) and retainer, "outer elongated strip" (16), portion attached at one end via a hinge-like permanent junction (17) and at the other end by a fastening clip (21) that allows for release between the two parts. The two fastening clips (18 and 21) are intended to mate together to form an encircling loop around the user. The junction between the base and retainer of Haskell is not designed for easy separation at 21, and is clearly depicted in Figure 2 of Haskell to be fastened by co-parallel

threading of the base (14) and the retainer (16) into a buckle-type apparatus (21). Furthermore, Haskell specifies that the fastening clip (21) must be removed before the user may slide the score card retaining unit (12) off of the elongated strip (16). The invention of Haskell is not intended for retaining belt accessories or anything other than the described score card retaining unit (12), which may only be adapted to "any other object which is subject to repetitious marking" (column 3, line 46).

U.S. Patent No. 5,665,057, issued September 9, 1997 to Murphy, describes a heated back supporting device including a belt portion having a pair of pockets formed in an interior surface thereof. The belt portion is securable around a waist of a user. A plurality of utility pockets are securable to an exterior surface of the belt portion.

U.S. Patent No. 5,852,849 issued December 29, 1998 to Lansing et al., describes a dental bib holder with a flattened midsection and flanking rod-like extensions ending in terminals to which clips are attached. The clips are described as either fixed in position or "rotatably secured to the rod portions at the terminals" (column 2, line 61). The use of the word "terminal" is taken to mean positioned at the extreme end of the rod portions of the device. It is clear from the text and drawings that Lansing et al. refer only to axial rotation of the terminal clips relative to the rod portion of their device, and the clips are meant to open toward the terminus of the device as described. Rotations other than axial are

neither implied nor explicitly stated in any text or figures provided by Lansing et al. The bib holder of Lansing et al. is "formed of a flexible rubber or rubber-like plastic material" (column 2, line 1) and could not support belt accessories, nor is it claimed to have that capacity. The device described by Lansing et al. forms a partial loop around the user's neck when in use, and is not intended or claimed to retain anything other than a bib while in use.

U.S. Patent No. 5,941,438, issued August 24, 1999 to Price, describes a utility belt having adjustable means and strip loops, rings, hooks, and pockets for holding various small items. The utility belt of Price cannot receive standard accessories such as utility pouches or knife holders which are intended to slide onto a belt for mounting. This limitation is due to the various rings, hooks, or loops, and even if these were removed, the belt must be removed from the wearer to mount or remove these types of accessories.

U.S. Patent No. 6,209,766 B1, issued April 3, 2001 to Kwon, describes a belt-mounted apparatus for carrying golf accessories. The device comprises a belt saddle-clip with a plurality of tee holders and ball marker holders. This device would not hold standard accessories such as utility pouches or knife holders since they cannot be mounted and retained between the belt and the carrying apparatus of Kwon.

U.S. Patent No. 5,718,023, issued February 17, 1998 to Billish, describes a pen holder with a clip attachment to a user's belt. As in '766 to Kwon, this device would not hold standard accessories such as utility pouches or knife holders since they cannot be mounted and retained between the belt and the carrying apparatus of Billish.

U.S. Patent No. 6,328,193 B1, issued December 11, 2001 to Schiff, describes, in a preferred embodiment, a personal article retention system including a tether having a means on one end that attaches to a portable personal article (for example, a wallet, a pager, or eyeglasses) of its user. The other end of the tether passes through a first connector body and is then detachably connected to a second connector body, with each of these connector bodies being clamped on either side of the belt or waist portion of the user's clothing. The functionality of Schiff's invention relies on tethers that encircle the user's waist, and the device can accommodate, at most, two articles (one at each terminus of two tethers).

U.S. Patent No. 6,473,941 B2, issued November 5, 2002 to Mei et al., describes a fastening assembly and method using a belt loop/snap arrangement in which a belt loop of a pair of pants or other garment is combined with a female or male snap part. The other mating snap part half (male or female) is attached to the bag or carrying case of an electronic device.

None of the above inventions and patents, taken either singly or in combination, is seen to describe the instant invention as claimed. Thus, an individual utility carrier solving the aforementioned problems is desirable.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a utility carrier that may be removably attached to a user's clothing, most commonly onto the waistband, but also onto any other suitable material edge of wearable or non-wearable items for the convenience of carrying or supporting handy tools, such as holstered knives, pouches for holding small items, electronic devices, measuring tapes, etc. In general, the present invention is intended to carry any item adapted to be harnessed to a user via a standard waist belt. Importantly, the proposed utility carrier does not attach to itself at opposite ends or encircle the user's waist or form a loop around any part of the user's body, and is thus not a utility belt in the strict sense.

The utility carrier may be conceptualized as having a retainer portion and a base portion. In principle, the base functions to attach the utility carrier to some supporting material, such as the user's waistband, while the retainer functions to secure accessories to the base.

Accordingly, the utility carrier in one embodiment will have a retainer portion and a base portion hinged at one end with an easily releasable mating fastener system at the other end so that accessories may be slipped over the unfastened end of the retainer, which is then fastened to the base to secure the accessories from slipping off of the retainer. Clips are mounted, molded, or otherwise attached to the base near, but not at the terminus of, both ends of the utility carrier, where said clips may be rotatable in a plane parallel to the plane of the wide flat surfaces of the base and/or retainer in order to facilitate right or left hand preferences.

To better facilitate right- and left-handed use in another embodiment, the utility carrier may also be constructed in the form of a retainer which, by appropriate mating fasteners, fully detaches from the base at both ends.

In another embodiment the retainer and base are functionally fused into a single piece of material, herein referred to as a retainer-base. In such an embodiment the clips may be said to attach directly to the inner flat surface of the retainer-base which then can be said to serve the functions of the base (to define the spatial separation and structural relationship between the clips) as well as the retainer (to hold accessories to the utility carrier).

The proposed utility carrier is designed in such a way that it easily facilitates manufacture in a variety of materials, such as plastics, leather, woven fabrics, metals, etc., and is flexible enough to conform to the variable curvatures presented by the human waist, while also allowing for a straight configuration, but is rigid enough to support accessories without substantial sagging. Rigidity may be accomplished by material strength or structural features.

The utility carrier described herein is intended to be an intermediary device used for secure attachment of one or more belt-wearable accessories to cloths or other articles having an appropriate edge onto which the utility carrier may be clipped/clamped. Accordingly, the following are objects of the invention: 1) to provide a utility carrier which is about a quarter of the length of an average waist belt and which is attached to the user's clothing by clips or clamps rather than extending and buckling around the entire waist of an individual, 2) to provide a utility carrier having a base portion attached to the user's clothing by clips or clamps and a retainer portion for attaching accessories to the base portion, 3) to provide a utility carrier in which the retainer portion is hinged to the base portion at one end and removably fastened or attached to the base portion at the other end or along its entire length by a hook

and loop or similar fastener, 4) to provide a utility carrier as above where the retainer portion is removably fastened or attached to the base portion at both ends or along its entire length by a hook and loop or similar fastener, allowing complete removal of the retainer portion from the base, 5) to provide a utility carrier consisting of a retainer-base having rotatable clips for allowing the installation of accessories in a first position and for engaging clothing in a second position, and 6) to provide a utility carrier consisting of a retainer-base which removably attaches at both ends to separate clips or clamps.

These and other objects of the present invention will become readily apparent upon further review of the following specification and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is an environmental, perspective view of an individual utility carrier showing typical usage of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a perspective view of a utility carrier of an embodiment having a hinged end and a removably fastened end.

Fig. 3 is an elevational, front view of the utility carrier of Fig. 2.

Fig. 4 is an elevational, front view of a utility carrier of an embodiment having an accessory retainer fully removable from a base by unfastening at both ends.

Fig. 5 is a rear view of a utility carrier showing the rear of the base portion, having rotatable clips.

Fig. 6 is a detail side view of a rotatable clip of Fig. 5 in an open configuration.

5 Fig. 7 is a detail side view of a rotatable clip of Fig. 5 in a closed configuration.

Fig. 8 is a perspective view of a utility carrier of another embodiment having a hinged end and a removably fastened end.

10 Fig. 9 is a side view of the utility carrier of Fig. 8 in an open configuration.

Fig. 10 is a perspective, exploded view of a utility carrier having a retainer-base with detachable clips.

Similar reference characters denote corresponding features consistently throughout the attached drawings.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is a utility carrier which may be removably attached to a user's waistband or other suitable material edge for the convenience of carrying handy tools, such as holstered knives, pouches for holding small items, electronic devices, measuring tapes, and other items adapted to be harnessed to a user by a standard waist belt. The utility carrier allows belt accessories to be attached to the waistband of trousers, shorts, skirts, or other clothing, with or without a belt, as well as to virtually any other wearable or non-wearable material having

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a thin edge. The utility carrier allows its user to easily transfer accessories, normally harnessed to the waist by a belt, to other convenient places, permitting a multitude of possibilities, not only for carrying and storing accessories as a unit, but also for quickly and conveniently situating a set of belt accessories in a work area (for example, at a workbench or in an outdoor cooking area) by clipping (or clamping) the assembly to some other supporting material.

The utility carrier can accommodate two or more accessories at once and can, therefore, be used to assemble semi-permanent "kits" of accessories that are commonly used together in particular applications. With the utility carrier's clip-on or clamp-on construction, it can supply the secondary function of a waist belt (to harness accessories) without the necessity of serving the primary function (to adjust waistband circumference).

Accessories need not be removed from the utility carrier in order to remove the carrier from the waist (or other supporting material); nor is it necessary to remove the utility carrier from the waist to remove an accessory from it. Furthermore, there is no need to unbuckle or remove the utility carrier to unsnap, open, or remove the article of clothing to which it is attached. The utility carrier and harnessed accessories can be removed and attached without removal of the accessories from the utility carrier and, therefore, the carrier and accessories can effectively form a unit which is quickly and easily installed on any appropriate surface. This unit can be composed of any set of

belt accessories harnessed by the utility carrier, providing limitless possibilities for virtually any application, from camping and hiking to carpentry, etc.

The utility carrier functions as an intermediary device used in securely attaching various tools and accessories commonly worn on a waist belt to the waistband of clothing or any other structure or material with a thin edge to which something can be clipped or clamped. Appropriate accessories are generally any tool or device housed in a holster or sheath, or any article or equipment supplied with a closed strap or clip which allows it to be attached to a standard waist belt.

The utility carrier can accommodate one or more accessories at a time, and can be removed or attached to clothes or other materials without removing the accessories. The utility carrier obviates the need to wear a belt to harness tools and accessories to one's person by functioning as a supporting structure for belt-wearable accessories and by providing a means for attachment of supported accessories to clothes or other accommodating structures via clipping or clamping devices that form part of the structure of the utility carrier.

There are many ways to construct the utility carrier which would effectively provide the functional operation of the inventive product. Differences in construction reflect options for securing accessories onto the utility carrier and for clipping, clamping, or attaching by other methods the utility carrier to articles of clothing or other materials, but do not

reflect changes in functional properties. The particular design of clips, clamps, clasps, and hinges is not critical to the inventive concept. In essence, any suitable clip, clamp, clasp, and/or hinge mechanism (including fusion of base and accessory retainer at one end) could be substituted for corresponding items in the disclosed design without affecting its function or utility. Furthermore, the utility carrier may be constructed without clasps or hinges. In general, the utility carrier construction includes two or more clips, clamps, or other attachment members for securing the carrier to a supporting substrate (for example, clothes). These clips, clamps, or other attachment members are generally mounted about the ends of a base structure, but may be mounted at other effective locations along the base structure. The base and retainer structures may each be one or more pieces depending on the sophistication of the model, or they may be conceptually, as well as physically, fused into one structure that serves all of the important functions of each structure (called a retainer-base). One or more additional clips, clamps, hooks, or other attachment members may be incorporated between the two end clips, clamps, or other attachment members for central support of the utility carrier.

Referring to Fig. 1, the utility carrier **10** of the present invention is shown mounted on a waist band **W** of a pants **P** worn by a user **U**, wherein an accessory retainer **12** serves to attach a knife holder **14** and a utility pouch **16** to the user's waist via a base (not shown) having clips **17** proximate each end of the utility

carrier 10 (see Fig. 2 for clarification of base and clip positions). The utility carrier 10 is mounted so that the user's left hand **LH** and right hand **RH** may easily be used to withdraw tools from the holder 14 and pouch 16 such as a knife from the holder 14 as shown.

Referring to Figs. 2 and 3, a first embodiment of the present invention is a hinged utility carrier 20 that includes a base 22 and an accessory retainer 24. The accessory retainer 24 has a first end, a second end, a first side 27, and a second side 29. The accessory retainer 24 is able to be unfastened for mounting accessories thereon and removing accessories therefrom, and to be fastened for retaining the accessories thereon. The base 22 has a first end, a second end, a first side 23, and a second side 21. The base 22 is generally coextensive with the accessory retainer 24, such that the first and second ends of the base 22 correspond to the first and second ends of the accessory retainer 24, respectively. The first side 23 of the base 22 faces the second side 29 of the accessory retainer 24, while the second side 21 of the base 22 faces an article of clothing or other thin-edged material when the utility carrier 20 is removably attached to the article of clothing or other thin-edged material.

The base 22 and the accessory retainer 24 are permanently, or removably, attached or fastened at one end by a hinge 26 to allow rotation relative to each other in opening and closing the utility carrier 20 for mounting or removal of accessories as desired. The end opposite the hinge 26 is removably secured by a clasp snap

head **28** located in a multiple station groove **30** and a clasp snap seat or receiver **32**. The multiple station groove **30** allows the adjustment of the snap head **28** relative to the accessory retainer **24** to allow for curvature of the human waist. Simple spring clips **34** (not shown in Fig. 3) are fastened to the side of the base **22** opposite the snap seat **32** for sliding over the waistband of the user to mount the utility carrier **20** for use. Also see Fig. 5 which is a depiction similar to a rear view of the embodiment of Figs. 2 and 3 where the base **22** (**41** in Fig. 5) supports clamps as a substitute for simple clips **34**.

Referring to Fig. 4, there is shown another embodiment of the present invention that is similar to the embodiment shown in Figs. 2 and 3, but having a clasp snap head **28, 28'** and a multiple station groove **30, 30'** at each end of the accessory retainer **25** so as to be completely removable from the base **22** (see Fig. 2). Such a configuration allows for mounting and removing tools and accessories from either end as desired. As shown in Figs. 2-4, the snap heads **28, 28'** and multiple station groove **30, 30'** are located on the accessory retainers **24, 25**, while the snap seat or receivers **32** are located on the base **22**. Alternatively, the snap heads **28, 28'** and multiple station groove **30, 30'** can be made to be on the base **22** while the snap seat or receivers **32** can be made to be on the accessory retainers **24, 25**.

Referring to Figs. 8 and 9, another embodiment of the present invention is a hinged utility carrier **60** that includes a base **62** and an accessory retainer **64**. The accessory retainer **64** has a

first end, a second end, a first side 67, and a second side 69. The accessory retainer 64 is able to be unfastened for mounting accessories thereon and removing accessories therefrom, and to be fastened for retaining the accessories thereon. The base 62 has a first end, a second end, a first side 63, and a second side 61. The base 62 is generally coextensive with the accessory retainer 64, such that the first and second ends of the base 62 correspond to the first and second ends of the accessory retainer 64, respectively. The first side 63 of the base 62 faces the second side 69 of the accessory retainer 64, while the second side 61 of the base 62 faces an article of clothing or other thin-edged material when the utility carrier 60 is removably attached to the article of clothing or other thin-edged material.

The base 62 and the accessory retainer 64 are permanently, or removably, attached or fastened at one end by a hinge 66 to allow rotation relative to each other in opening and closing the utility carrier 60 for mounting or removal of accessories as desired. The end opposite the hinge 66 and most or all of the length of the sides 63, 69 of the accessory retainer 64 and the base 62 are removably secured, with the sides 63, 69 removably secured to one another, by a releasable mating fastener structure or system, such as hooks 68 and loops 70, hooks and hooks, a velcro type fastener, or any other mating fastener structure or system known in the art. The part and counterpart of the mating fastener structure or system are securely attached to the accessory retainer 64 and the base 62, respectively. Alternatively, the end opposite the hinge

66 and most or all of the length of the sides 63, 69 of the accessory retainer 64 and the base 62 may be removably attached, instead of removably fastened, by methods known in the art.

Simple spring clips 34 (shown in Fig. 9) are fastened to the side of the base 62 opposite the loops 70 for sliding over the waistband of the user to mount the utility carrier 60 for use. The base 62 (41 in Fig. 5) supports clamps as a substitute for simple clips 34.

Referring to Figs. 5-7, there is shown another embodiment of the present invention and the clamps 42 of the embodiment in an open position and a closed position. The utility carrier 40 includes a relatively flexible accessory retainer 41 having a pair of clamps 42. Each clamp 42 has an outer leg 43, an inner leg 44 at an apex 45, and a clamp slider 46. Each clamp slider 46 has a short outer leg 47 and a long slotted inner leg 48 connected to an apex 49 and movable in a groove 50 to alternately open (clamp body apex 45 and clamp slider apex 49 spaced apart) and close the clamp 42 (clamp body apex 45 and clamp slider apex 49 closed together) so as to allow mounting and securing to the waist band of the user. As best shown in Figs. 6 and 7, the groove 50 begins in and extends from the outer leg 43 around the apex 45 and ends in the inner leg 44 and is so sized and disposed as to completely receive the clamp slider 46. At least one of the clamps 42 is rotatable so as to align the clamp 42 with the accessory retainer 41 for allowing the sliding of tool holders onto and off of the accessory retainer 41. The clamp slider's long slotted inner leg 48 is

slotted to allow mounting of a swivel 56 by means of a mounting stem 52 fitting within the slot (not shown) of the inner leg 48 to body inner clamp leg 44 at connection 54 while allowing the slider 46 to slide between the extended position and the closed position.

(See Fig. 10, below, which shows a similar clamp 84 having the slotted slide feature 87.) The swivel 56 is inserted through the accessory retainer 41 through an aperture (not shown) to allow rotation of the clamp 42.

Referring to Fig. 10, there is shown another embodiment of the utility carrier 80 of the present invention wherein an accessory retainer-base 82 has snap-on clamps 84 about each end. Each snap-on clamp 84 has an opening slider 86 with a slot 87 to allow movement relative to a snap head 88, and operates similar to the clamps 42 of Fig. 5. The snap heads 88 are removably attached to the accessory retainer-base 82 by snap seats 90. In this configuration, one or both clamps 84 may be removed for ease in mounting or removal of accessories. At least one of the clamps 84 exhibits a profile sufficiently low so as to allow the loop structure of belt-wearable accessories to pass over the clamp 84 before that clamp 84 is attached to the article of clothing or other thin-edged material.

The clips 34 and clamps 42, 84 can removably attach the base 22, 62, the accessory retainer 24, 41, 64, and/or the retainer-base 82 to an article of clothing or other thin-edged material without the utility carrier 10, 40, 60, 80 forming a loop around a user or fastening to itself at the first and second ends of the

accessory retainer **24, 41, 64**, the base **22, 62**, and the retainer-base **82**. Alternatively, other attachment members or systems known in the art may be used to removably attach the base **22, 62**, the accessory retainer **24, 41, 64**, and/or the retainer-base **82** to the article of clothing or other thin-edged material. Rotation of the clamps **42, 84** is in a plane parallel to the plane of the rear flat surface of the base or retainer-base.

The utility carrier of the present invention may be made of plastics, fabrics, leather, metals, or combinations of such materials, and may be rigid or flexible. Flexible models accommodate the variable curvature of the human waist, as well as facilitating applications of the utility carrier other than to secure accessories to the waist (for example, attachment of accessories to a strap on a backpack or belt bag).

It is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to the embodiments described above, but encompasses any and all embodiments within the scope of the following claims.